NEFREKEPTA

GILBERT MURRAY

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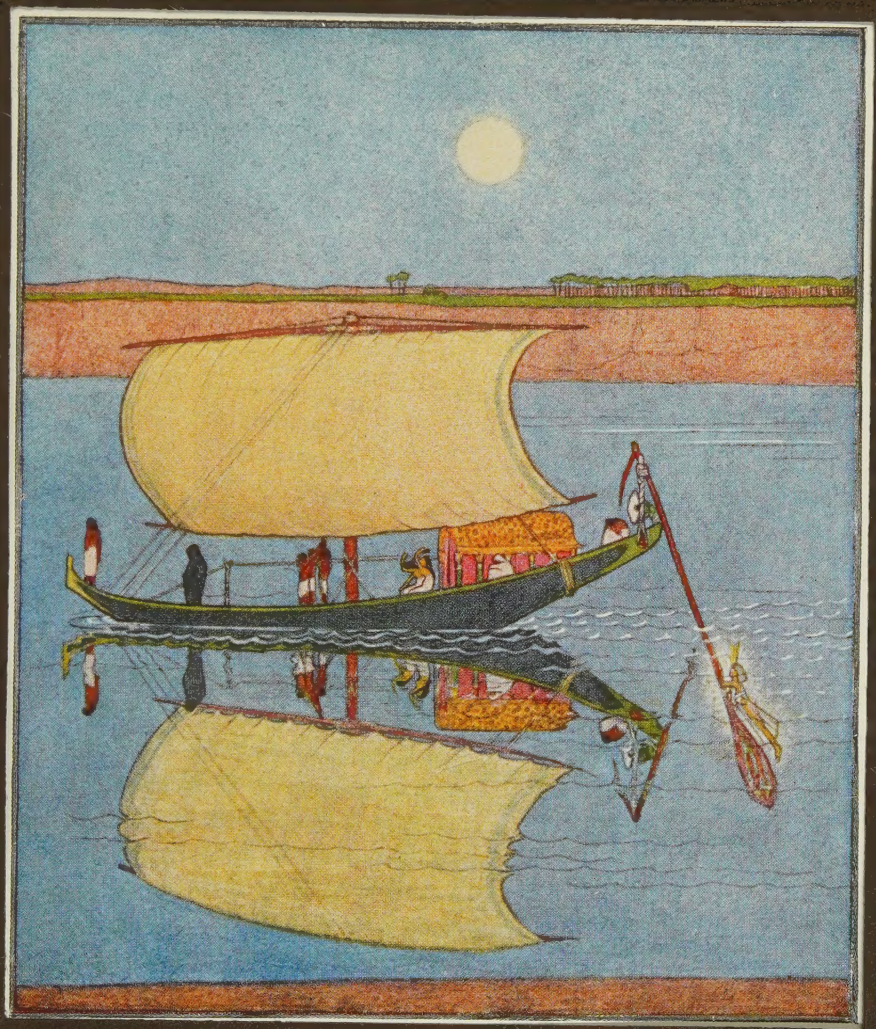

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The Story of *NEFREKEPTA*

FROM A DEMOTIC PAPYRUS

Put into Verse by

GILBERT MURRAY

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PREFACE

THE original of this tale is in Demotic Egyptian, in prose, on a fragmentary papyrus dated 'the first month of winter, in the fifteenth year' of some king unnamed. Palaeographical evidence suggests some date about 100 B.C. My own education has been neglected in the matter of Demotic, and I know the tale only from the literal translation which accompanies the text in Dr. Griffith's *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis.* In that form, however, it so fascinated me that I presently found myself, to the neglect of more urgent duties, putting it into English verse and filling up the gaps in the narrative. I have tried to preserve the style and often the exact words of the original, as rendered by Dr. Griffith, but in other respects temptations have been great and I have not resisted them.

The names present some difficulties. In Demotic, if I understand aright, the vowels are not written and

the consonants often do not mean what they seem to mean. The hero's name is spelt, roughly speaking, N('y)-nfr-k'-Pṭḥ, the phantom lady's Ty-bwbwe; the priest's is written Stne, but was probably pronounced, so Dr. Griffith tells me, Sĕtôn or Sĕtân.

While doing the verses I was constantly reminded of certain Egyptian illuminations by Miss Florence Kingsford, now Mrs. Sydney Cockerell, which I had seen some years ago, and she has been so kind as to provide the book with a frontispiece and tail-piece.

Those who desire further information about Setne will find it in the introduction to Dr. Griffith's learned and delightful book (Clarendon Press, 1900).

G. M.

NEFREKEPTA

Introduction

Setne Khamuas, son of Rameses,
High Priest of Ptah, beneath his garden trees
  Dwelt with his wife and children; wise was he
In Books of power and ancient Masteries.

And much he pondered on a tale they told,
How Nefrekepta, dead in days of old,
  Held still the Book of Hermes which is Thoth
Hid in his tomb, and never loosed his hold.

And longing for that Book so pierced him through
He called to him his brother An-Herru,
  The son of Menkh-Art, saying: 'Brother mine,
Be with me in a deed I have to do.'

And he said: 'I am with thee till my doom
Find me.' And SETNE said: 'I seek the tomb
Of NEFREKEPTA dead, and take the Book,
The Book of THOTH hid in its inmost room.'

That night they found the tomb, and AN-HERRU
Stayed at the door, but SETNE passing through
On seven great doors and seven windings spake
His spells, and found the room; and all was true.

For there lay NEFREKEPTA in his pride,
The Book beneath his head; and at his side
The ghosts sate of a woman and a boy,
Shadows beside the dead; and SETNE cried:

'Ye thronèd Shadows, whosoe'er ye be,
And thou, dead PHARAOH, tombed in majesty,
All hail! I, SETNE, scribe and Priest of PTAH,
Command thy Book be rendered up to me,

The Book of THOTH which lies beneath thy head.'
Then never word nor sign came from the dead,
But the two Shadows lifted up their arms
Lamenting, and the woman swift outspread

Her hand to save the Book, and cried: 'Aha!
SETNE KHAMUAS, is the will of RA
Not yet fulfilled upon us? This is I,
AHURE of the race of MERNEB-PTAH.

Ahure's Story

Therefore give ear, and let the Book of Gold
Tempt thee no more, till all my tale be told.—
It happened in the days of MERNEB-PTAH,
The long days, when the King was very old,

And had no son nor daughter; in their room
A son's son and a daughter's daughter, whom
Thou seest, NEFREKEPTA the Good Scribe,
And me who watch beside him in this tomb.

And PHARAOH mused and spake: 'Go near and far,
Bring me the lordliest of my chiefs of war
With all their daughters and their sons, to make
Feast on the third day; call me all that are.'

So PHARAOH spake; but lo, exceedingly
Did I love NEFREKEPTA and he me.
And much I feared that PHARAOH at that feast
Would take some youth and maid of high degree,

A war-lord's daughter and a war-lord's son,
And fast bind NEFREKEPTA to the one,
And me to the other; so his race would grow,
But we two meet no more beneath the sun.

Now PHARAOH's ancient Steward loved me well,
And NEFREKEPTA too; and it befell,
One day he watched me and the second day
He spoke: 'AHURE, surely I can spell

A story that is written in four eyes.
Thou lovest NEFREKEPTA and likewise
He loveth thee.' And I cried out: 'O friend,
Speak unto PHARAOH quick, ere this day dies!

Pray that he give me to my cousin straight,
Nor seek to make us two live separate.'
And he said: 'I will speak; for so the law
Commandeth, by long ages consecrate;

The King's sons wed the daughters of the King.'
Then all my heart was like a water-spring
Leaping; and soon he went and soon returned
Sad, and reported of his counselling:

'I spake to PHARAOH, saying: "Lord, may life
Like RA's be thine and glory in all strife!
Is it not meet that NEFREKEPTA take
By ancient rule AHURE to his wife?

Let PHARAOH wed with PHARAOH; so shall pure
PHARAOH be born :—the rule doth still endure."
And PHARAOH spoke not, but his brow grew dark
With trouble; and I said: "O King, for sure

Thou hast some grief; say what doth vex thy brow?"
And PHARAOH said: "None vexeth me but thou.
I have but two, and if those two be wed
All PHARAOH's fruit is hanging on one bough.

Nay, search and find me one great war-lord's son,
Another war-lord's daughter. With the one
And other let these children twain be wed.
So PHARAOH's line on many threads shall run."'

Next day the hours passed and the feast was set
Before the King; and I was called ere yet
The Lords came. And I stood before the King
Not as of old, my heart being desolate.

And Pharaoh spake: 'Ahure, was it thou
Didst send that message that hath made my brow
  Troubled, that with thy brother thou wouldst wed?'
And I said: 'Hath the King not made a vow,

A war-lord's daughter and a war-lord's son—
Behold us!—Let my brother take the one,
  And let the other take Ahure; so
Shall Pharaoh's race be great beneath the sun.'

And there I laughed; and Pharaoh laughed again,
And called the Steward of the King's domain:
  'Steward, this night to Nefrekepta's house
The maid Ahure take and all her train;

And all things beautiful go with her there.'
Thus I to Nefrekepta's house did fare,
  And Pharaoh sent wrought silver and fine gold,
And Pharaoh's servants stood about my chair.

And NEFREKEPTA took with me delight,
And feasted PHARAOH'S servants; and that night
Was made our marriage, and we knew great joy,
And never, never, failed I in his sight;

For each his fellow loved exceedingly.
And when my time of bearing came to be
I bore the son who lieth in this tomb,
MERAB; a name in the Kings' Book is he.

The Book of Thoth

And thus it fell, that of all things on earth
My brother NEFREKEPTA most of worth
Did hold the wisdom that in Books is writ.
The tablets of the House of Death and Birth,

And all that on the temple walls is said,
And all the lore of the Kings' Tombs he read,
And ever walked in Memphis on the Hill
Of Kings, and stored the wisdom of the dead.

Now one day was a high procession sent
To PTAH's great house; and NEFREKEPTA went
And walked therein; right slow he walked, and read
All that was writ on wall and pediment.

And, watching him, behold, an aged Priest
Laughed. And he said: 'God's mercy be increased!
Why laughest thou at me?' And he: 'I laugh
At no man, not the greatest nor the least;

I laugh to think how thou shalt laugh anon,
When that which no man's eye hath looked upon,
The secret Book of HERMES which is THOTH,
Is opened to thine hand and called thine own.

He wrote it, and the Gods before his face
Fled.—And it lies . . . If ever word of grace
Or spell of power thou need, come then to me
And speak. Thou shalt be guided to the place.

Two leaves it hath, on which two sorceries
Are written. If thou read the first of these,
Thou shalt enchant the earth, the clouds above,
The underworld, the mountains and the seas ;

And all the words that wingèd things may say,
And creeping things, shall be made thine that day ;
Yea, thou shalt see all fishes in the deep
And God's power guiding each upon his way.

And if thou read the second, though there lies
Above thee all AMENTI, thou shalt rise
And take thy shape again, and see the MOON
And RA and all the children of the skies.'

And NEFREKEPTA cried : 'O Priest and King!
I bless thee. Tell me every gorgeous thing
Thy soul desireth, they shall all be thine,
Wilt thou but guide my steps to that great spring.'

Then smiled the Priest: 'My Prince, so let it be!
Send me an hundred bars of silver, free
Of all fault, for my burial when I die;
And two full priesthoods give me without fee.'

And NEFREKEPTA called a youth, and bade
An hundred bars of silver pure be made,
And two new priesthoods named to THOTH and PTAH,
And sealed him priest to PTAH and THOTH unpaid.

Then the man spoke: 'The Book of THOTH doth rest
In Coptos Sea, hid in a golden chest;
The gold doth lie in silver; that in wrought
Ebon and ivory, fitted nest in nest;

That in sweet cedar; that in bronze doth lie;
The bronze in iron. 'Tis knotted with a ply
Of endless Snake; and round it for one league
Are scorpion, asp, and worm to make men die.'

He spoke, and NEFREKEPTA no more knew
What place he stood in nor what breath he drew,
  But forth he hied him in great joy, and caught
My hand, and all this tale he told me true;

And cried: 'South, South to Coptos! None shall stay
Our going.' But I turned from him away
  And found that aged Priest and said: 'Thou Priest,
May AMUN curse thee for thy words this day!

The Book of THOTH, the serpents and the sea!
Most bitter striving thou hast made for me,
  And bitter watching till my lord's return;
False art thou, and thy South all cruelty.'

And much I prayed my brother not to sail
To Coptos, but my prayer might not avail,
  For straight to PHARAOH's throne he went, and spake
To PHARAOH of the Priest and all his tale.

And PHARAOH said: 'What wilt thou I should do?'
'Give me thy ship of pleasure and its crew,'
He said: 'and with me let AHURE sail
To find the Book, and the boy MERAB too.'

So PHARAOH's pleasure-ship was brought, and all
Its crew; and southward in high festival
We sailed to Coptos; and the news went forth
Before us, and the folk stood on the wall.

The Priests of ISIS and HARPOCRATES
And the Chief Priest of ISIS, all of these
Came down to NEFREKEPTA, and to me
The women of the Priests in their degrees.

They led us to their Temple in a line;
And NEFREKEPTA gave ox, goose, and wine,
And brought to ISIS and HARPOCRATES
Rite and oblation and all dues divine.

A temple beautiful exceedingly
Was over us, and there four days did he
  Make with the Priests of Isis holiday,
And the priests' women holiday with me.

But when the morning of the fifth day came,
He called for wax made holy, without blame,
  And shaped a boat with men, and spake a spell,
And breathed; and life woke in them like a flame.

He went on board that boat, and heaped it high
With sand, and pushed it from the shore. And I
  Sate on the shore alone, and said: 'I wait
Here till he comes, and if he dies I die.'

He said: 'O Rowers, row me to the place
I wot of.' And the rowers rowed apace,
  By day, by night, and ceased on the third day.
Then he took sand, and cast the sand a space

Before him, and the water rose on both
Sides, and the floor below did ooze and froth
With scorpion, asp, and worm to make men die,
One league before the treasure chest of THOTH.

And round the chest was coiled an endless Snake.
Then NEFREKEPTA took his charms, and spake
A spell on all that league of serpent things,
And down they sank, and slept, and could not wake.

Then o'er the league of asps he walked, and fought
With the endless Snake and slew it; but it caught
Life as it fell, and joined again and flew
To tear him; and again its death he wrought;

Then a third time it quickened, and again
He fought and smote the endless Snake in twain
The third time; and between the parts he cast
Fine sand; and it lay still, for ever slain.

And on he strode and found the caskets, rolled
Each within each; iron the outmost fold,
  Then bronze; then cedar; then came ivory
And ebon; then the silver; then the gold.

He broke the gold, and kneeling on his knees
Read out the first of the two sorceries,
  Enchanting all the earth, the clouds above,
The underworld, the mountains and the seas.

And everything that bird or worm might say,
Or mountain beast, he heard and knew that day,
  And saw all fishes moving in the deep,
And God's power guiding each upon its way.

He read the second sorcery, and far
In heaven he saw the shining forth of Ra,
  And all his Children round him, and the Moon
Uprising, and the shape of every Star.

And NEFREKEPTA shut the Book, and then
Went to his boat and called the magic men :
'Row day, row night, and row me to the shore.'
So rowed they, and he reached the shore again.

And found me sitting by the sea to wait
His coming. Seven full days and nights I sate,
And ate nor drank, but waited, and was grown
Like them they bear to the embalmer's gate.

I said to him : 'My brother, let me see
The Book that wrought such pain on thee and me.'
He gave the Book into my hands, and slow
I read what there was writ of sorcery.

I laid upon the earth and sky my spell,
The underworld, the hills, the ocean swell ;
And understood what tales the birds of heaven
And mountain beasts and deep-sea fishes tell.

Then did I read the second spell, and high
Above saw Ra enthronèd in the sky,
  And all his Children ; and I saw the Moon
And all the Stars in all their shapes go by.

And Nefrekepta bade them bring a roll
Of new papyrus, and wrote out the whole
  Of those two charms, and melted it in wine,
And drank it. So the charm was in his soul.

Then sacrifice we made and gifts of worth
Heaped high in all the temples, and set forth
  On Pharaoh's ship with singing and great joy,
One league, one league, from Coptos to the North.

But Thoth himself had seen our deed, and, ah,
His wrath was hot! Before the throne of Ra,
  'Judgement!' he cried, 'Give judgement between me
And Nefrekepta, son of Merneb-Ptah,

Who broke into my treasure-house this day,
And slew my Snake and stole my Book away.'
  And Ra said : 'Surely he is in thy hand,
O Thoth, both he and his, to spare or slay.'

And lo, a Power of God went forth, and fell
On all the river and lay invisible;
  And Thoth said : 'Nefrekepta shall come home
No more, nor one of those that with him dwell.'

Then the boy Merab, singing, from the shade
Of Pharaoh's awning stepped; one step he made,
  And, lo, the River took him, and his face
Was covered and the will of Ra obeyed.

Then all about us cried with a great cry.
But Nefrekepta from his awning high
  Called with a spell, and the dead boy rose up;
But over him that Power of God did lie.

Then NEFREKEPTA spake a written spell,
And the boy MERAB told all that befell
About him; yea, the very words which THOTH
Spake at the throne of RA he made him tell.

Then slow to Coptos we returned, and bore
The boy MERAB to the embalmer's door;
And like a Prince he was embalmed and laid
On Coptos Hill with the great dead of yore.

And NEFREKEPTA said: 'My sister, come
Quick; let us row till all the road be foam,
Lest PHARAOH hear what hath befallen us,
And his heart faint because we come not home.'

We went on board, and northward rowed apace
One league from Coptos; and I saw the place
Where MERAB died, and from the canopy
Stepped, and the River took me; and my face

Was covered and the will of RA obeyed.
Then all upon the boat great mourning made,
  But NEFREKEPTA from his awning high
Called, and I knew a spell upon me laid;

And I rose up, though o'er me still had hold
That Power of God. I rose and did unfold
  All that befell me, yea, and every word
Which THOTH before RA's throne had spoke I told.

Then slow to Coptos he returned and bore
Me, his dead sister, to the embalmer's door;
  And like a Queen I was embalmed, and laid
Where MERAB my dead child was laid before.

He went on board, and down the stream apace
Rowed one league north from Coptos, to the place
  Where MERAB died and I, AHURE, died;
And stood and communed with his heart a space:

'Shall it be backward now, ere THOTH can slay?
Shall it be on to PHARAOH, come what may?
And, lo, when PHARAOH asks me where those two,
His children, are, what is it I shall say?

"I took thy children to a burning land
And living let them die; and here I stand."
I will not speak it.'—Then he bade them bring
A band of finest linen, such a band

As dead kings wear, to bind them at the last;
And seven times round his body made it fast,
And close against his body bound the Book
Firm; and from out the canopy he passed.

And, lo, the River took him, and the will
Of RA was done. And they on board did fill
The air with wailing: 'Great woe! Grievous woe!
Dead, dead, is the Good Scribe and all his skill.'

And down the stream the pleasure-ship sailed on
Toward Memphis, and to no man there was known
Where NEFREKEPTA lay; and when they came
Message was brought to PHARAOH on his throne.

And PHARAOH came in robes of funeral,
And all the folk of Memphis, great and small,
And PTAH'S High Priest and all the Priests of PTAH,
And PHARAOH'S council and his household, all;

And saw the ship, and, lo, beneath it drowned
Saw NEFREKEPTA lying, both hands wound
About the rudder, guiding still his ship;
So great a scribe was NEFREKEPTA found.

They raised him, and against his body dead
They found the Book pressed close. And PHARAOH said:
'Behold the Book he died for! Let it lie
In this King's grave, a pillow for his head.'

Then sixteen days embalming did they keep
For NEFREKEPTA, thirty-five of deep
  Wrapping; of burial threescore days and ten;
And here he resteth in the House of Sleep.

And I, AHURE, far away must lie
In Coptos; but my heart within doth cry
  For NEFREKEPTA, and our shadows come
Waking and watch beside him sleeplessly.

The Contest for the Book

And thou, SETNE KHAMUAS, who dost look
To take from us that which from THOTH we took,
  Where hast thou paid the price?—These twain and I,
Our lives on earth were taken for this Book.

But SETNE said: 'AHURE, none the less,
For all thy tale of old unhappiness,
  Yield me the Book at NEFREKEPTA's head:
I take it else by wrath and bitter stress.'

Then NEFREKEPTA from his marble bed
Rose up: 'O thou to whom my wife hath said
  Words vainly wise, and thou hast hearkened not,
How wilt thou win the Book beneath my head?

Think'st thou to take it from me by the wit
Of a good scribe? Or wilt thou play for it
  Four games of draughts, the fifty points and two?'
And SETNE said: 'The draughts'; and down did sit.

Between them then the gaming board they drew
For the first game of fifty points and two;
  And NEFREKEPTA won the game, and spake
A spell, and with the board he ruled it true.

And SETNE ankle-deep into the floor
Sank. And again they played, and as before
  Dead NEFREKEPTA won the second game;
And SETNE sank up to the thighs and more.

Again they played; and NEFREKEPTA dead
Won the third game; and SETNE to his head
  Sank, and the earth came close below his ears.
And SETNE lifted up his voice in dread:

'Brother, where art thou? Brother AN-HERRU,
Bear word to PHARAOH of the deeds I do.
  Pray PHARAOH the last amulets of PTAH
Be sent me. Haste! Haste!'—Then the dead man drew

The board up close, and the fourth game began.
And AN-HERRU far off had heard, and ran,
  Ran unto PHARAOH's throne and told his tale.
And PHARAOH said: 'To save a sinking man

Take the last amulets!' And AN-HERRU
Flew with them to the dead man's gate, and flew
  Through all the windings, all the doors, and, lo,
The game was playing still between those two.

He laid the amulets on SETNE's head,
And SETNE shivered in the earth, and said
A great spell; then, upstriving from the ground,
Reached out his arm, and caught the Book, and fled.

Light went before him, and behind great gloom
Closed, and he heard AHURE for her doom
Wailing: 'King Darkness, come! King Light, farewell!
Gone, gone, is the last comfort of the Tomb.'

But NEFREKEPTA on his marble bed
Lay back and laughed: 'A little while,' he said,
'O Shadow of my Sister, and this man
Shall come again. Therefore be comforted.

His dreams shall bring him back, before mine ire
Kneeling, to do the worst of our desire,
A fork upon his neck, a rod between
His hands, and on his head a bowl of fire.'

Ta-Buvuë, and the Return of the Book

But SETNE out into the light above
Returned, and saw the light with a great love;
And sealed the tomb, and stood at PHARAOH's throne
And told his doings and the end thereof.

And PHARAOH said to SETNE: 'These be vain
Doings. Go back and give the dead again
His book, as a wise man to a wise man,
Now, lest thou give it some day with much pain.'

But SETNE hearkened not. By day and night
He read the Book and took therein delight,
And showed it at his feasts; and all his days
Were sweet to SETNE and his breath was light.

'Twas joy to read, joy also when he made
Mirth with his sons, joy when he rose and prayed
In PTAH's great Temple; till one day, behold,
In PTAH's great Temple, through the colonnade,

A troop of damsels fair exceedingly,
And one who led them. Beautiful was she,
And not like other women; good beyond
All he had seen or ever thought to see.

Her girdle was of gold and gold her hood,
And all that touched her fragrant was and good,
And maids behind her fifty walked and two;
And, seeing, SETNE wist not where he stood,

But called the Slave that served him: 'Haste thee, go
To where yon woman worships; I would know
What need hath brought her and what name she bears.
Go swiftly.' And the servant bowed him low,

And found a handmaiden who walked aside:
'Damsel, thy mistress cometh in much pride;
Say by what name men call her, and what need
Brings her to Memphis.' And the maid replied:

'This is the child of the Chief Vision Seer
Of Bast, Queen of the Far World and the Near;
Her name is TA-BUVUË, and a vow
To PTAH, your mighty God, hath brought her here.'

The slave returned and told to SETNE all
The handmaid spoke; and SETNE said: 'Go, call
This handmaid secretly behind the rest;
Greet her from me and speak my name withal:

"SETNE KHAMUAS, son of RAMESES,
Greets thee: he sends ten gold Arsinoës;
And more, if any man hath done thee wrong,
SETNE the judge will right thine injuries;

All this, if thou wilt speak with him an hour,
And help him. To a great and secret tower
Thou shalt go in, where none shall do thee hurt
Nor know thy name; so great is SETNE's power."'

The slave returned and all of SETNE's word
Told to the handmaid; and her wrath was stirred,
  And loud she railed, as though 'twere blasphemies
His lips had spoke; and TA-BUVUË heard,

And called him: 'Strive not with this foolish one;
But hither, tell to me what wrong is done.'
  But quick the handmaid ran before, and cried:
'He bringeth words of shame from PHARAOH's son:

Thus saying: "SETNE, son of RAMESES,
Greets thee, and sends ten gold Arsinoës;
  And more, if any man hath done thee wrong,
SETNE the judge will right thine injuries";

All this, if I will speak with him an hour
And help him. To a great and secret tower
  I shall go in, where none shall do me hurt
Nor know my name; so great is SETNE's power!'

Then TA-BUVUË laughed: 'I think he spake
This word to thee for TA-BUVUË's sake.—
  Go, speak to SETNE, saying: "Who am I
That thou shouldst send my bondmaid gifts to take?

I am no common woman; I am one
Born of great kings, who walk my ways alone,
  Priestess of Bast, the Queen of the Two Worlds,
And seeking no man's gift and fearing none.

If me thou seekest, I will speak within
Mine own house: knock and thou shalt enter in:
  In Per-Bast, by the Houses of the Dead,
Past Kemi, where the desert doth begin.

There ask for TA-BUVUË. I go hence
Now with my maids to make magnificence
  Before thee. And no man shall watch thy way
Into my house, nor mark thy coming thence."'

The Slave returned, and SETNE's heart did fail
For very joy at hearing of the tale.
He called his servants: 'Make me a swift boat
Ready, with rowers and a silken sail.'

And SETNE marvelled in his heart a space,
And in his mirror looked; and, lo, his face
Seemed beautiful again, and all his limbs
Light, like a young man when he runs a race.

So walked he to the boat and entered in,
And bade them row as ne'er they rowed, to win
Per-Bast, beyond the Houses of the Dead,
Past Kemi, where the desert doth begin.

And there, behold, a tower exceeding tall
Set in a pleasant place; and a great wall
Was round it, and a garden to the north
With many trees. And SETNE gave a call:

'Whose is this tower?' And heard an answer: 'Here
Dwells TA-BUVUË, daughter of the Seer
Of Bast, she who is named The Beautiful.'
And SETNE entered and no man was near.

And up the garden ways he went, and cast
His eyes on all and marvelled as he passed:
And TA-BUVUË came and held his hand
And spoke: 'Now by the Holiness of Bast,

This day is happiness. Come to mine high
Chamber, we two alone amid the sky.'
So up the stair they went, to a cool room
Of turquoise wrought and lapis lazuli.

Couches were there, decked with fair linen strand
Like PHARAOH's couch; and cups of gold did stand
On a great dresser, and a cup of gold
Was filled with wine and laid in SETNE's hand.

And Ta-Buvuë said : 'Take wine and meat.'
But he said : 'Love, how could I drink or eat?'
Then in a censer burning gums they brought
And spices rare and unguent for his feet.

Lo, none was like her, none that bore the name
Of woman! And his heart rose like a flame:
'O Ta-Buvuë, let the end be now:
Let us make perfect that for which we came!'

'Is not this house thine own and I thy bride?'
Said she: 'Yet one thing first shalt thou decide.
I am no common woman, but to Bast
Pure, and full-filled of majesty and pride.

Thy present wife put from thee, that no soul
Near me may stand; and write it in a scroll.
And all thy wealth of Priesthoods and of Powers,
With me alone thou shalt divide the whole.'

Said SETNE: 'Call a scribe.' And at their call
The scribe came; and he wrote a scroll withal
And cast off SETNE's wife; and SETNE's wealth,
With TA-BUVUË did he share it all.

And in that hour one spoke to SETNE: 'Lo,
Thy children, waiting in the court below,
Sit with the dogs and curling cats of Bast.'
And SETNE said: 'Bring them, and let them know.'

Then TA-BUVUË laid her raiment proud
Off, and put on soft linen, like one vowed
To bridal; and her body through the robe
Shone, as the moon shines through a little cloud.

And back she turned to him and poured him wine,
And said: 'These children must not strive with mine.
Make them to sign the scroll, too, and give up
Their part in thee.' And SETNE made them sign.

The fine, fine, linen robed her like a mist
Which robeth RA in pearl and amethyst;
And SETNE marvelled gazing; and again
She spoke, and SETNE's hand she took and kissed:

'These children, knowing all to me thou art,
Hate me.—Let them be mine to take apart
And do my will upon them.' And he said:
'Do all the abomination of thy heart.'

She slew them then, and from her window fine
Cast them. And far below he heard the whine
Of dogs that tore and curling cats of Bast
Which lapped their blood. And SETNE drank his wine.

He said: 'Those children that were slain had birth
By me. O Woman, thou hast made much dearth
About me. Give me that for which I came,
Else have I nothing, nothing, on this earth.'

'Hast thou not me,' she said, 'in place of all?
Come, therefore!' And she led him through the hall
To a fair couch, ebon and ivory;
And down he lay, and spread swift arms withal

To clasp her; and within his arms outspread,
Behold, she withered, withered; and her head
It had no eyes, and downward all her jaw
Dropped, like the jaws of the uncared-for dead.

And SETNE strove to rise, but cloud on cloud
Held him: hot wind and hate and laughter loud,
And one that wept for a world's glory gone,
And dust, dust, dust: and SETNE shrieked aloud:

And saw: and, lo, all naked in the day
In a waste place of bricks and shards he lay,
And clutched a burning kiln. And near him passed
The way and much folk jeering on the way,

Soldiers and priests, beggars and men of pride.
And SETNE rolled him in the dust and cried:
'My children!' And a great lord rose in wrath:
'Thy children stand this hour at PHARAOH's side,

Thou naked man! Thou Priest whom none shall bless!
And ask for thee. What? Is it drunkenness?'
And SETNE said: 'They live.' And said: 'O King,
Throw me, I pray, some robe in this distress,

Wrought by dead NEFREKEPTA in his ire.
I go to yield him up his worst desire,
A fork upon my neck, between my hands
A rod, and on my head a bowl of fire.'

One of the bondmen threw him, at that call,
A poor man's robe; and on to PHARAOH's Hall
He journeyed with them, and stretched out his arms
And clasped his sons, and told to PHARAOH all.

'Yea, take the Book, take quickly,' PHARAOH said,
'The rod, the fork, the fire upon thine head,
And seek dead NEFREKEPTA in his tomb,
And kneel and pray the pardon of the dead.'

And SETNE heard; and quick ere set of sun
He stood before the Tomb, and one by one
Passed the great doors, and opened the last door,
And, lo, a light through all the chamber shone,

A great light, like the going forth of RA.
And while he stood the Woman cried: 'Aha,
SETNE, thou com'st! And if thou com'st alive
'Tis PTAH hath saved thee and the grace of PTAH.'

But NEFREKEPTA laughed. And SETNE came
Kneeling: 'O King, with rod and fork and flame
I come,' he said; 'and yield thee up thy Book.
What is thy judgement? Is it further shame?'

But NEFREKEPTA laughed: 'I would not now
Make thee my slave, nor smite, nor burn thy brow.
This was enough.—Yet one thing lacketh me
Still, and thereto I bind thee by a vow.

Far off in a strange grave 'mid much annoy
My wife AHURE lieth and the boy
MERAB; 'tis but their shadows, by the art
Of a good scribe, dwell here and have no joy.

Therefore I charge upon thee my behest:
Go, bring from Coptos to this House of Rest
My wife AHURE and MERAB the boy.'
And SETNE rose and took on him the quest.

And straightway before PHARAOH bowed his head
And told him all the tale. And PHARAOH said:
'I give thee mine own pleasure-ship to sail
To Coptos and bring back those ancient dead.'

So PHARAOH's pleasure-ship with all its crew
Was brought, and southward on the wind they flew
To Coptos; and the High Priest saw the ship,
And all the Priests, and came in haste thereto.

The Priests of ISIS and HARPOCRATES
And the Chief Priest; SETNE to all of these
Gave ox and goose and wine, and with them walked
On Coptos Hill amid the tombs and trees.

Three days and nights among the tombs they trod
In Coptos on the Hill, and every sod
They turned and marked, and every graven stone,
And the Scribes' writings in the House of God.

But never could they find by night nor day
The tomb where MERAB and AHURE lay.
And NEFREKEPTA knew they found it not,
And sent his shadow forth to guide their way.

Like an old man, a bent and aged Priest,
It sate. And SETNE said: 'Joy be increased,
O Father! Thou dost know the things of old;
Three days and nights we search, and have not ceased,

To find the tomb which holds AHURE dead
And MERAB.' Then the old man raised his head:
'The father of my grandsire in old days
Spoke of it to my grandsire; and he said

The father of his grandsire once had told
His grandsire how those two were laid of old
Far in the southmost corner, where the house
Now stands in which the scrivener tells his gold.'

And SETNE said: 'Old man, methinks I see
Some hate here. Hath the scrivener injured thee,
That thou wouldst wreck his house and dig beneath?'
He answered: 'Have a watch set over me;

Then raze the scrivener's house, and, under ground
By the south corner, if there be not found
  Both MERAB and AHURE, have me slain!'
So there they held him and a guard stood round.

The scrivener's house was razed; and that same day
They found where MERAB and AHURE lay,
  And, like great PHARAOHS, down to PHARAOH's boat
Bore them 'mid Priests and Princes in array.

And SETNE sought that ancient man, and, lo,
He was not. By that sign did SETNE know
  This too was NEFREKEPTA. Then they built
The scrivener's house again, and turned to go:

And went on board, and back to Memphis bore
Those PHARAOHS home, with stream and wind and oar;
  Singing they went, and PHARAOH heard them sing;
And PHARAOH rose and met them by the shore,

And led those Mighty Ones in robes of pride
To NEFREKEPTA'S tomb, and sanctified
  Their entering in, and made a mound above;
And there for ever sleep they, side by side.

And there is finished all that fell between
SETNE and NEFREKEPTA and his Queen
  AHURE and the boy MERAB. 'Twas writ
In the first month of winter, Year XV.

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